Psalm 8: Scansion with Notes on Text, Prosody, and Tropes

When the masoretic accents clash with the proposed scansion, the fact is noted. As in MT, words conjoined with a maqqeph (°) receive a single dominant stress.¹

Symbols

A strophe made up of three lines, 1:(1:1) in structure

concludes a strophe;  a sub-stanza;  a stanza;  a section

A line consisting of three versets of two stress units each; the last two form a pair.

Reference to a location within the text.

MT, if preserved, would violate the general rule or the length rule.

The addition or subtraction of a maqqeph vis-à-vis MT.

Change in verset division, or line division, vis-à-vis MT.

Change in strophe, stanza, or section division vis-à-vis MT.

Change in vocalization vis-à-vis MT; MT following.

Conjecture based on witness; MT following.

Conjectural emendation vis-à-vis MT; MT following.

A stanza consisting of 4 lines, 9 versets, and 24 stress units.

A poetic composition made up of 40 lines, 90 versets, and 216 stress units, with a total of 17 strophes, 6 stanzas, and 2 sections.

Cases of ssm (semantic-syntactic-morphological) parallelism (or hypotaxis) per verset, averaged over 40 versets.

The first line contains two pairs of two elements; enjambment occurs (hence the ); the second line begins with a pair of elements in chiastic ssm parallelism with the second pair of elements of the first line (hence the ); it concludes with another pair of elements that match up with elements a and b in the first line, but in reverse order (hence the ); enjambment occurs (hence the ).

The first verset’s a is not paralleled in the second, but is gapped (hence the ); b²’s match with b¹ is concomitant with a mismatch in one or more fundamental ssm dimensions


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Progressive lengthening of items in parallelism is characteristic of Ps 8: אַדִּיר הָאָ֑רֶץ אֲדוֹנֵ֗ינוּ יְהוָ֤ה עַל־הַשָּׁמָֽיִם מִפִּ֤י ההוֹדְךָ כָּבֹד אֱלֹהִים מְ֭עַט שָׂדָֽי שִׁמְךָ. The emendation of痕迹 to תְּנָה (cf. Judg 5:11) goes back to Johannes Dyserinck (1878) and has found defenders ever since, including Eduard König and Jan Fokkelman. Neither König nor Fokkelman qualify as scholars with a penchant for unreasonable emendation.

In the scansion offered here, stress on short-syllable words like כָּל is consistently deleted and stress on long-syllable (CvCC) and multisyllabic words is consistently retained. Lines are divided into two to three verses each of which contains two to three prosodic words. Tripartite lines divide into two half-lines, most often in accordance with natural semantic and syntactic breaks. The scansion differs from that of Fokkelman (The Psalms in Form [2002]) insofar as a verset in his view may contain two to four prosodic words. This view leads him to take v. 4 as a single line. In so doing a multi-line enjambed structure in the first half of the poem to match that of the second half (vv.7b-8) is eliminated.

Fokkelman rarely scans in terms of two beat versets, though his text model allows for them. If he did, the numerical perfection he finds in many psalms based on average syllable counts would go out of the window. In my view, Fokkelman’s perfect numbers are an artifact of analysis, not a statement of fact. For full references to Fokkelman’s work and critical reviews, go here.

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